

*Confronting Violence:
Recounting Resistance,
Envisioning Justice*



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
NEW DELHI
MARCH 17-19, 2004

Organised by
Jagori, Sangat and VDAY

Preface

The conference was a confluence of the energies of the women's movement in South Asia and the world. The women's movement started three decades ago, and now includes three generations of women. This is a movement, for justice, peace and democracy.

As over 300 women shared their experiences over three days – as women, activists and agents of change for a more humane society – the women's' movement itself unfolded before the participants. The movement, the struggle thus far and the challenges ahead – be they in the form of institutionalised violence, continuing wars or resurgence of sectarian/ racial/ caste/ communal violence – all came under a close examination in the course of the conference. Strategies that have been used and implemented in the past were evaluated and futures strategies were spoken about.

The issues examined at the three day conference, held in the sprawling campus of Hamdard University in New Delhi, included patriarchy, sexuality, masculinity and militarism; woman's body and body politic, stereotyped projection of women in media and collective response of the movement to counter the subtle and not so subtle trends of violence against women.

The responses – sometimes structured in the form of presentations, sometimes flowing freely in the form of animated discussions and sometimes coming alive in the form of plays, musical expression and theatre – also wove for the participants the shape of things that 'ought to be'.

The participants came from near and far. They came from regions in the midst of continued wars – Afghanistan and Iraq – as also from the rest of the world where women continue to wage their war against violence. There were women from India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Iraq, Germany, France, Netherlands, Sweden and United States.

They spoke, they heard, they shared.

No Turning Back!

Welcome Address

March 17, 2004

The tone of the conference was set by Kalyani Menon Sen and Abha Bhaiya on an emphatic and optimistic note. In fact, the upbeat tenor remained with the speakers and participants alike all through the proceedings.

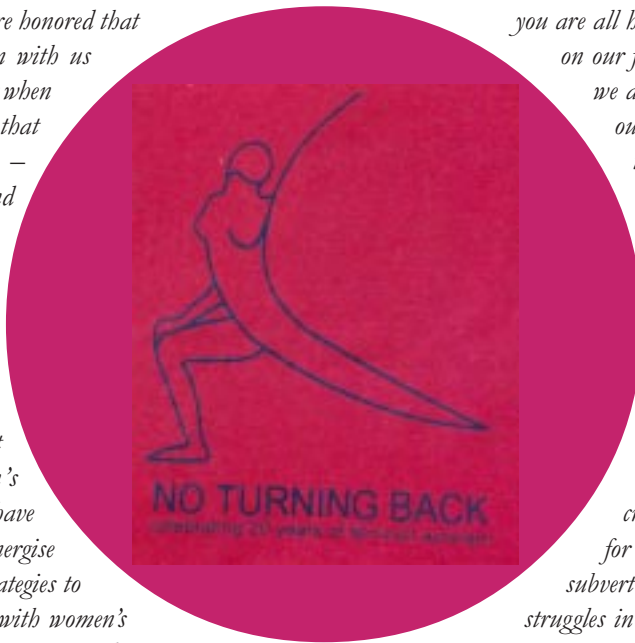
Kalyani: no turning back

It is a great day for Jagori. We are honored that inspired and supported us, been with us coming of age – this is a moment when world are coming together to say that even contemplate turning back – time to celebrate our solidarity and



Abha: let's create another country – a country of women

For centuries we have been that reflects a sense of the past future. We, in the women's national border – in fact, we have come together to reconnect and reenergise experiences, perspectives, and strategies to us. It is time for us to link up with women's Bangladesh, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and so on.



you are all here. Women across the globe have on our feminist journey. It is not just our we as feminists of South Asia and the our movements have come too far to there is no turning back! This is a determination.



dreaming about this day. A day and a day that takes us into the movement have not ever experienced crossed and erased borders! We have for the future as we share our subvert the forces that threaten to demolish struggles in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, Let us create another country – a country of women.



Eve: patriarchy in deep crisis

Patriarchy is in a deep crisis. Women have never been so alive and so strong. We need to connect with one another to bring a new paradigm.



Key Note Address

Kum Kum Sangari

The second phase of the feminist movement in India has focused on issues such as rape, dowry death or body mutilation, and violence as a contextual issue. In spite of these efforts, violence against women is still a major issue as it was quarter of a century ago. This challenge needs to be understood and addressed.

Local and global forces have come together with an aggressive discourse of public violence that rationalises communal violence. There are emerging global definitions that invokes “clash of civilizations”, a justification for state sponsored violence against the “designated others”, under the umbrella of national security.

The reciprocal relationship between different types of violence, can be understood as the connective tissue between patriarchal systems and other social structures: a volatile mode of containment, socialisation, status quoism, backlash against change or assertion by women. All the main offenders – class, caste, family, community and state are caught on this logic.

The “vertical hierarchies” that justify sexual violence involve more than one or more aggressors. Women continue to be held responsible. Women are harassed for being assertive or for their caste identity. Thus, the onus of male violence, is being shifted to women.

Violence takes various forms:

Family violence - techniques of violence that make women “the other”. It has a material basis (property, reproductive control, labour and so on). Natal families act as agents of enforcing chastity, heterosexuality and marriage. Violence is a systemic feature of all contemporary patriarchies – ranges from militaristic to domestic. Forms of patriarchal delegation of violence cut across religion, class and caste – female feticide/dowry etc. What it represents is not an individual’s control but social control over the fetus.

Marriage as a site/locus of control: community punishment in collaboration with local elite for inter-caste marriages. In most cases of intercaste marriages, straying couples have been forced to break the marriage and women remarried either to old men or

socially boycotted or killed. Killings are usually publicly witnessed and there is complicity between the police and the perpetrators as well as collusion between the caste panchayats and statutorily elected panchayats.

“Honour killings” and caste-based violence are forms of collective violence. “Honor killing” is an unjustified term – such a definition, which justifies “protection of tradition”, should not be accepted. Feminists worldwide should discard such sanction bestowed upon honor killing. Its acceptance would imply accepting the representation as well.

new forms of violence

New traditions are being invented – panchayat (Village Council) which mandates for violent acts are emerging in new villages and regions, which have had no earlier history, as well as among “backward castes”. These are often attributed to emerging tensions between dalits and other backward castes. The “custodial” of these panchayats is not only useful in retaining existing power, but also a means for wresting new authorities for caste panchayats. Caste councils are male dominated, and, more significantly, as a site of inter and intra village alliances, they function as wider regional sites of patriarchal male bonding.

Public violence: everyday patriarchal violence is one of the contexts of public violence and these share several assumptions and modalities as is evident from the accounts of the Gujarat carnage. Feticide and infanticide was a recurring feature in the Gujarat carnage. The triumphant enactment of collective control of the female reproductive body is a vicious public extension of the general patriarchal control routinely exercised by the family or caste group.

State violence: modalities are very similar to those of caste councils and communalism. Although state is not a direct perpetrator of violence but its machinery is highly conducive to perpetuate violence. In fact, the state works against the same right it guarantees to its citizens.

The common features and close linkages between family, state and civil society are easily discernible. If communal violence is meant to polarise Hindus and

others, including all those women who step out of bounds, then widow immolation is set up as a sifting mechanism to sort out good women from “other” women. The symbolic effect of violence is directed to all such “other” women. It produces the norms that govern other forms of patriarchal violence: norms of correct behavior.

There are some similarities between patriarchy and fundamentalism. Both patriarchy and fundamentalism move towards a repetitive pattern that has evolved over the years into a blueprint that can be repeated or replicated in new places. These are public, planned, collective, witnessed and lucrative crimes, which involve village elites and local power structure, besides the active presence of the crowd that lends collective legitimacy to the myriad acts of violence.

What are the implications of the public exercise of patriarchal power? Collective crimes are symbolically much more effective because they are public and appear to be consensual; they seem to work better as “backlash” and provide a modality that can be adapted by police and villagers alike. If older forms of spectacle assumed some fixed authority, local groups for their own agendas stage these spectacles in order to annex authority. Most ominously, collective violence provides a ready passage from communal and patriarchal ideologies to physical acts of violence.

In the context of violence, some issues cannot be ignored:

- The sharp acceleration of a long term and reciprocal relation between communalism and patriarchies
- A domestic tightening in the social field of gender and religion to counterbalance the transnational dilutions of a neo-liberal economy
- The need for a continuous social volatility, not only to manipulate the failed promise of neo-liberalism, but also to move towards a more authoritarian regime
- The centrality of gender to the production of such volatility by the Hindu right. If India moves towards a consolidated fascism, then it will be a species of fascism that relies on patriarchies to gather consent for its entry, and it will push both communalism and patriarchies into an even more monstrous partnership
- Finally the women’s movements need to rethink

about the linkages of various patriarchal structures. They need to reformulate their position more substantially on the discourse on legality and also to look at the relation with the state

Time to Challenge Patriarchy

Eve Ensler

Women and the women’s movements need to be more daring and not be afraid to challenge patriarchy. What patriarchy could do to women and how the power of grief could be used to counter violence are quite well known.

The idea of the “nation” has to be challenged by women. Violence and denial of rights to women are still universal. The patriarchal narrative is the same across all caste/class/country. Women’s bodies have been divided by patriarchy in the same way as it divided the country.

As patriarchy was growing in power, women were also finding ways to resist the tide of fascism. Being adversarial also would open people’s consciousness.

no ice creams for women!

*The hold of Patriarchy in Afghanistan
is such that women were not even allowed to
eat ice cream under the Taliban!*

All over the world, the challenge for women was to become “great” rather than “good”. Vagina “warriors” and their “gut level” creative strategies were the ways in which women were challenging norms of patriarchy. In fact, “*The Vagina Monologues*” created a space that could not be denied to women. It challenged normalisation of violence by breaking the silence.

Women need to think “outside the box”. They are prepared to break their chains and therefore it becomes important to have bigger feminist movements to give a voice to the many women.



Session I

BEARING THE MARKS OF INJURY: THE BODY AS THE LOCUS OF PATRIARCHAL VIOLENCE

Chair: Saskia
Speakers: Ayesha Khanam, Bangladesh
Bina Agarwal, India
Indu Agnihotri, India

Construction of Nation/Nationalism and Violence Against Women in Bangladesh

Ayesha Khanam

The principle and the main spirit of the constitution of Bangladesh as declared in 1972 was constituted of secular elements and characteristics but since 1975, there had been a major change in earlier declared goals and objectives.

Since 1988, Islam had become a state religion, which conceptually changed the principle of secularism, and this had a negative consequence on women. The long standing failure of the state to protect and promote the rights of women, specially violence against women was a matter of serious concern to all.

The women's movement had been fairly active and strong. Public advocacy by women had led the Government to take a number of actions to contain violence against women. Women's groups while waging their struggle had been continuously raising issues on existing notions of chastity and the deep-seated notion about women's character and women's body. They were also fighting against fatwa and fundamentalism.

Home and the World: Revisiting Violence

Bina Agarwal

Do rights over property, to some extent cushion women against violence? While there is no simple answer to why men abuse their wives, balance of property could prove a deterrent.

Spousal violence ruptures the myth of the home as a protective space and exposes it as a chamber of terror for many. It not only devastates the women who suffer it but also scars the children who witness it and dehumanises the men who perpetuate it.

Not surprisingly then, few issues have so concerned the women's movements in India and elsewhere as domestic violence, and few have so unified women's groups across regions and political affiliations.

No study so far has examined the impact of women's property status, which can affect women's risk of spousal abuse. In examining the links between women's economic situation and violence, it is necessary to probe the effect of women's property status, in particular, their owning a land or a house.

A house or land visibly signaled the strength of a woman's fallback position and her tangible exit option and could thus act as a deterrent to spousal violence. Should she face violence, owning or having access to a house or land might provide her an immediate escape option.

Access to land enhances women's livelihood options and sense of empowerment. That would reduce her risk of violence by increasing her economic security and reducing her tolerance. The important point though was not whether a woman actually used the exit option that immovable property provided, but that the very existence of that option could deter violence.

It was critical to test how women's property status affected spousal violence. A study in Kerala, while examining the relationship between violence and property rights of women, revealed a high incidence of both physical and psychological violence. This was despite Kerala's favourable development indicators. On a long-term profile, 36% women reported at least one incident of physical violence after marriage. Psychological abuse was even higher: 65% reported some form of such abuse. Clearly, violence against women is pervasive, frequent and takes multiple forms.

propertied women less prone to violence?

Is violence less if women own immovable property?

This indeed may be the case, going by a study done in Kerala. Ownership of property by women was associated with a dramatically lower incidence of both physical and psychological violence. For instance, as many as 49% of the women who owned neither land nor house had suffered long term physical violence, compared with 18% and 10% respectively of those who owned either land or a house.

The protective impact of owning a home or land in reducing women's risk of violence emerged as significant even after controlling factors such as the household's economic status, the woman's age, duration of marriage, childlessness, hers and her husband's educational and employment level, the husband's alcohol consumption and childhood exposure to violence and social support from parents and neighbours.

In Indian law, domestic violence is treated as a criminal offence. Also, there are some all-women police stations, family counseling centers, short stay homes and so on. But those institutions are handicapped in the extent of help they could provide to women, as the overall existing legal and other measures were hopelessly inadequate.

All in all, women's access to immovable property such as housing and land is important not only for the well recognised reasons of enhancing women's livelihood options and overall empowerment, but also for notably reducing their risk of material violence.

Building Coalitions and Alliances to Counter Violence Against Women

Indu Agnihotri

Violence against women must be seen with all its lateral linkages - links between wider social and political terrain and the context in which women lived. It is imperative for the women's movement to focus on the ground on which women are being reconstituted. It is a matter of concern that people who have destroyed human rights were in the running for Nobel peace prize. There is an assertion of the new jingoistic world order - capture of Afghanistan by USA - with the assumption that the present world order was the one that would liberate women.

There is evidence of escalation of forms and levels of violence with new innovations in brutality which also has a greater social acceptance in the present day context as is seen in the case of Gujarat where violence was justified on the ground of "reaction"...!

The context in which violence takes place and the links between state, family and fundamentalism needs to be analysed. The context of violence is increasingly being constituted in the political domain. Body and body politic were both loci of patriarchies that allowed and

justified violence with new science and technology as vehicles of violence.

Women's ability to come out of violence is determined by much deeper and wider processes. However, any notion of change and liberty in the present context were being peddled at an individual level. While students are more aware of concepts such as "inequality" or "discrimination", they tend to see it more at an individual level and not so much as a social transformation. Also, the rights discourse fostered "individual" as the focus.

Though the women's movements in India and South Asia asserted vociferously against imperialism in the past, today it is quite diffused.

counter homogeneity

There is an urgent need to counter the notion of "homogeneity" and an urgent need to challenge the ways in which images of commonalities of experiences were being constructed, as levels of vulnerabilities are not the same for all women. Questions need to be asked: who are these women? Are the social processes enhancing the commonalities? Or increasing vulnerability? Are women's movements also constructing an artificial notion of "universal womenhood"?

There is a need to take into account the specificity of women's oppression, wherein, for example, the links between mental health and political processes need to be examined. How are rights continuously being violated? There is need to understand the homogenisation of violence. Anti-women practices (dowry or honor killings) have made steady invasion by using instruments of capitalism.

Hence, the need to push for a process of transparency and accountability from official agencies - law enforcement agencies, NCW and so on - but not like the way it happened in Kashmir (issue about women's citizenship). Women's movement has to engage with the political processes.

It is important to recognise the multiplicity of perpetrators of violence and the way body politic had been endorsing it. Alliance building and coalitions with other social forces had to be forged as the site of violence (women's body) is rooted in deeper forms of structural inequality.

From the Floor

* Voices are missing in other countries with regard to honor killings because of women's silence. For example, "honor killings" in Pakistan were more visible as the women's movement had exposed them. While in India, the silence had only been recently broken after "honor" had entered into the caste domain. And in any case, "whose honor" was a question continually being asked?

* Property had a material basis for violence not only for women but also for men. As Bina argues that in relation to women, property bestowed a sense of autonomy but the participants also focused on the need to take into consideration instances where women had become more vulnerable to violence because of property (widows).

* "Fatwa" was also a form of "honor killing" as the caste councils and governments were imposing religious principles to women's chastity. Thus alternative readings of scriptures by women's movements were needed.

From the Chair

While there are many issues that need to be tackled on a continuous basis, women are constantly challenged by new issues—whether it is "honor killings" or dowry deaths or sexual assault as an instrument of state and communal violence. It is indeed a painful realisation that women's rights and securities are seriously affected by the increasing militarisation of civil society.



Session II
REPRESENTATIONS OF THE
FEMALE BODY: NARRATIVES OF
CONSUMPTION, NATION
AND SEXUALITY

Chair: Khushi Kabeer, Bangladesh
Speakers: Akhila Sivasdas, India
Saskia Wierenga, The Netherlands
Hibaaq Osman, Somalia

Engaging Media

Akhila Sivasdas

Media cannot be monitored in an *ad hoc* and piecemeal manner; it has to be done consistently and rigorously. While doing that, it is not prudent to get into an “exclusive worldview” as it could lead to potential disengagement from the consumers of media. In fact, there is a need to analyse the multiple perspectives of viewers – viewers’ agency.

While taking into account the content and reception with regard to gender representation in the media, there is a need to adopt a holistic perspective. Satellite TV catalyzed a daily discourse that was “woman to woman”. In projecting that discourse, expressions and idioms of assertion, negotiations between old and new were used. There is also a strong use of familial dysfunctionality where the need to restore the Old Glory is repackaged.

Media views society in transition – a society wanting to loosen its allegiance to the old and move to the “new” at its own pace. It has a strong sense of time, identity and community. It is a latent or a felt expression.

Market forces also gave media access to brutal competition and associated practices where women as the key audience are both subject and object of competition. The images of women have changed and range from being a cricket commentator to an airhostess. They are no longer the captive audiences.

The main outcome is the representation or regeneration of the status quo. Therefore, the women’s movements need to intensify the debate about what is right and what is wrong. It is critical to unleash debates around rights, responsibilities, obligations, violation and so on. There is a constant churning going on and so feminist organisations should think of ways to engage with them.



Understanding Linkages between Woman’s Body, Sexuality and Politics

Saskia Wierenga

The representation of women’s bodies, gender and empowerment as reflected in the global discourses of gender and empowerment need to be looked at closely.

Women’s bodies experience pain and humiliation growing out of multiple crises – HIV/AIDS, conflict, poverty, fundamentalism and so on, which are linked to processes of globalisation and economic re-structuring.

However it is important to recognise that HIV/AIDS while exposing the one sidedness of the debate in terms of not addressing sexual dis-empowerment and social construction has now managed to re-establish the links between gender, sexuality and identity.

Silence of sexuality in the global empowerment discourse is a matter of concern. The gender related indices – GDI/GEM continue to be inadequate as they are still convergent with the national income. Since it is silent on sexuality and embodiment, it is necessary to include violence, genital mutilation, female feticide, etc.

women’s bodies as battlefields

It is a cause of concern that women’s bodies are often used as battlefields through symbolic control through dress code, behaviour etc. The question of female body, though personal at one level, is also deeply political. Even desires and pleasures are embedded and used by gendered power structures. Global media aids in the commodification and globalisation of pleasure.

There are competing ideologies around the construction of sexuality. Images of women either as “Madonna” or “whore” is still the common cultural script. There is an invocation of naturalised value.

Occidentalism is perceived in the west as the source of sexual decadence. Norms of sexual identity are imposed on both women and men. Hegemonic masculinity,

though, does not necessarily express only in physical violence. However, aggression is “switched on by transgendered practices” through normative heterosexuality.

Feminist rights discourse and discourse on silence are both overlapping in terms of ignoring the issues of diversity and heterogeneity. There is a need for more studies on women’s non-normative sexual practices.

Feminists and Beautification: Internal Contradictions

Hibaaq Osman

The process of making girls into creature and agents of patriarchy starts from the time they come out of their mother’s womb. For instance, female circumcision to fulfill male desire or aggression/violence used to “straighten women who have strayed” are quite common.

Further, the capitalist ploy of packaging and globalising women in the name of beautification has exposed the contradictory positions that women’s movements have on issues of beauty.

let’s be honest

Feminists, while opposing commodification of women at one level, are also consumers of beauty products. It reflects a deep ideological turmoil as women are being poisoned in the name of beautification. So, women need to be honest about their own crimes against themselves and restructure their relationship with their bodies and minds.

V-day has been building strategic alliances across movements and countries.

From the Floor

* The wider social context including household economic status, social status, husband’s employment etc needed to be factored in as also the need to legitimise notions of women’s autonomy – be it property or sexual choice. Also the need to look -at market support where multiple actors were intersecting – example the AP experience of women SHGs where government provided subsidised credit to access resources from market.

* What kind of “churning” is taking place in the media? The serials seemed to suggest that the poor had disappeared? What about the need to challenge the content? What about Jassi phenomenon – impact of contradictions within roles?

* Appropriation of new idioms by media was seen as new phenomenon. There were new possibilities of interaction between producers and viewers as the critical mass of each category of viewers was the object of media focus. However the packaging was very conservative - a constant affirmation of old tested and established norms and values. In that context, the Jassi phenomenon was seen as a marketing alternative that was providing space to women to challenge glamour as identity in a relative discourse.

* Further, the need to look at content and viewership separately was emphasised. Content could be critiqued but not the viewers. While providing alternative content, it was necessary to engage with the viewers and their reality context.

* Details on gender indices in Africa: UNDP GDI GEM followed the curve of national income while pretending to measure other parameters. Whereas the Africa experience tried to measure qualitative elements including, sexual division of labour, violence, sexual freedom along with the quantitative measure as “Gender Status Index”.

From the Chair

Women’s movements have managed to break the silence on a range of issues, campaigned, researched, theorised and created alternative institutions - forms of creative expressions.



Evening Programme

Time to reconnect...

“Barri” – The Acquittal A Play

Written by Shahid Nadeem and directed by Madeeha Gauhar, “Barri” raises the curtain on three women prisoners, chronicling their life through the eyes of a diary writing, ex-columnist Zahida and depicts the state of women, as they are subjected to various kinds of exploitation in a male oriented society.



The play was written in 1986 and first performed on International Women’s Day in 1987. The play is set in the context of the oppressive and discriminatory laws introduced by the Zia-Ul-Haq military regime in 1983. During this period, many rights won by women after a prolonged struggle, were taken away under the pretext of Islamic reform and replaced with oppressive laws.

The play is produced by Ajoka Theatre for Social Change. Ajoka was set up by a small group of cultural activists in Lahore in 1983 during General Zia-Ul-Haq’s politically and culturally repressive regime. Ajoka has been part of the struggle for a secular, democratic, humane, just and egalitarian Pakistan for the last 20 years.



Welcome Address
by Kamla Bhasin

I honor and welcome each “sbero”...we are delighted to have women coming from all over the world.... We feel empowered by your zest...we will not tolerate injustice or “bushful thinking” at the global and local level. Together with you I once again renew my commitment. We are for peace; we are against caste, communalism and oppression.

I am not a wall that divides, I am a crack on the wall. We are the cracks between rational and emotional, object and subject, two Kashmir, India and Afghanistan...we want peace in South Asia but not pieces of South Asia. Let the world know there is no turning back!



***“You can destroy all the flowers there
are but you cannot stop the spring from coming”***
Pablo Neruda



A Tribute to Three Sisters

The South Asian women's movement in recent years lost three of its prominent leaders – Salma Sobhan and Begum Sufia Kamal of Bangladesh and Yayori Matsui from Japan. The conference paid tribute to their contribution to the movement.

REMEMBERING SALMA SOBHAN

Hina Jalani paid a warm tribute to Salma Sobhan of Bangladesh. Hina recalled her friendship with Salma and said that though Salma had left us physically, she continued to live in our hearts. “We have all valued her friendship and her tremendous sense of humour will always be remembered. As a lawyer and a human rights activist, she has transcended beyond Bangladesh. One of her dreams was to have alternative voices of women to have regional presence. We all mourn her death but we know that she is with us as always.”

A TRIBUTE TO SUFIA KAMAL

One of the best-known poets in Bangladesh, Begum Sufia Kamal had joined every progressive movement in Bangladesh.

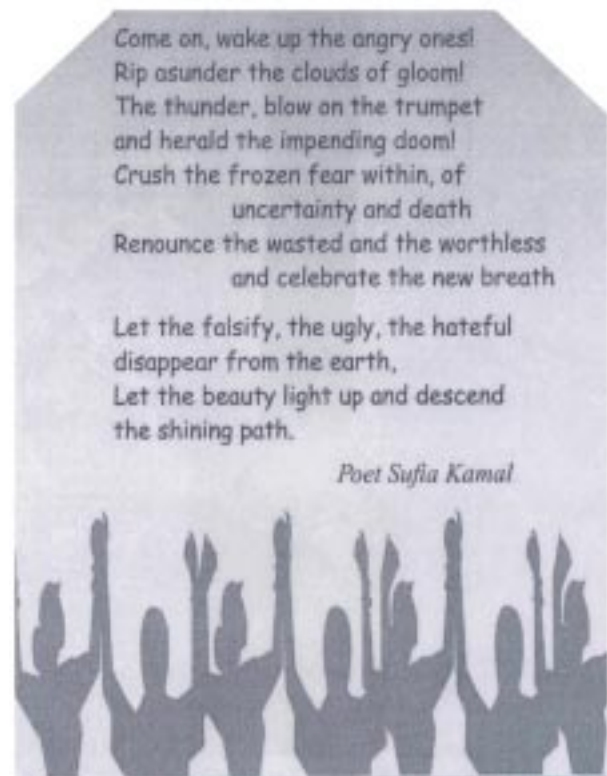
Ayesha said that it was the leadership of Sufia Kamal, the founder President of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad that defined the trend of women's movement in Bangladesh. Her undaunted courage and fearless role in the Bangladesh liberation war was legendary. All her life she raised strong voices against superstitions, autocratic rules, religious fanaticism, militarism and communalism.

YAYORI MATSUI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE MOVEMENT

A well-known feminist, Yayori worked with a newspaper in Japan. Kamla traced her contribution to the feminist movement in Japan and how the nature of the struggle she found herself in, led her to eventually campaign for a museum dedicated to peace.

Yayori was a part of a large movement – PP21- a movement by people of Asia. After Japan's offensive against Korea, Yayori painstakingly documented evidence on atrocities committed against women. Her biggest struggle was to help the victims stake claim for compensation. Against this backdrop, it was only natural that she wanted a museum dedicated to peace.

“Yayori is present in each one of us, and that only increases our resolve and determination to fight for a better world.”



Session III

CLAIMING TERRITORY: POLITICS OF MILITARISATION, WAR AND MASCULINITY

Chair: Amrita Chachhi, India/
the Netherlands
Speakers: Hungama Anwari, Afghanistan
Welmoed Koekkebakkar,
Holland
Hina Jalani, Pakistan

Afghanistan: The Silent Majority Slowly Finding a Voice

Hangama Anwari

Women in Afghanistan, torn by 23 years of war and destruction, including seven years of Taliban rule, have been reduced to the “silent majority”.

The Bonn agreement of December 2001 led to the setting up of commissions to expedite the process of rehabilitation, convening of *Loya Jirga*, judicial reform and promoting human rights.

Though a number of positive steps have been taken for the advancement of women’s role in the society, a lot remained to be done. The women’s movement faced many challenges.

* Security: 23 years of conflict has changed the attitude and mentality of people. Women continue to feel insecure and vulnerable

* Translation of the new legislations related to equality among women and men remains a key challenge before the judiciary. A significant number of women are in detention but there is no redressal mechanism in the absence of gender sensitive staff in the judiciary

* Likewise, domestic violence is not treated as a criminal offence so only a few prosecution of crimes against women

* High incidence of maternal mortality

* Lack of education opportunities: only 21% women are literate. Lack of literacy impacts upon women’s/widows income earning opportunities

* Lack of women’s participation in political processes

The intervention of the women organisations in

Afghanistan has led to a number of positive developments.

* Constitutional reform: 100 seats were occupied by women out of 502 seats in Loya Jirga. Also, active participation of women towards constitutional reform has led to the provision of equal rights of women and men and the right of minimum representation of 2 women in the lower house of the parliament.

* Women’s participation in electoral process; although it still remains an area of challenge but particular attention has been paid to recruit women staff to facilitate women’s participation as well as mobile registration teams are set up to ensure women’s registration.

The women’s organisations in Afghanistan would like the emerging positive trends to be consolidated by way of:

* Full implementation of CEDAW within the legal framework

* Expansion of security forces for safe participation of women in the electoral process

* Greater support to recruit women in the police force

* Advocacy to eliminate violence against women

* Gender mainstreaming policies in the Government

Iraqi Women: Images of Hope Amid War

Welmoed Koekkebakkar

Very little has been reported on what it means to be an Iraqi woman. This is perhaps the first time that images of Iraqi woman, their struggle and hopes, have come across vividly for the rest of the world. (Welmoed’s presentation was based on photographs of Iraqi women she took during her visits to Iraq before and after the war.)

Each woman (photographed by Welmoed) has

extraordinary stories of strength, resilience, dignity and perseverance as fighters while juxtaposed against the culture of fear, media representation of women and increasing number of suicides. In the midst of fear and death too, the indomitable spirit of women came through.

we will dance one day!

*"We have not been allowed to sing for 16 years;
but, we will dance one day!" –
An Iraqi woman in conversation
with photographer, Welmoed Koekkebakkar.*

**Women's Movement in Pakistan: Looking Back
at a Long Struggle**

Hina Jalani

Framework for action flows from life experiences. Issues rooted in identity form the basis for collective struggle and mobilisation for rights. Pluralism and accommodation of diversity are some of the critical elements in the human rights framework.

Politics of identity is used for control and to capture power, which has grave consequences for women. It impacts relationship with the state, functioning of social movements and women's engagement with issues and struggles.

The State often imposes a homogenised identity while denying diversity. Pakistan is a case in point, where religious identity supercedes ethnic identity. In Bangladesh, women's struggle was a challenge to the notion of "brothers" in Islam identity, which, by definition, marginalised women further.

The Islamisation of the state and strengthening of the privileges of one elect sect, the Sunnis, affected the outcome of the peoples' movements. The question of minorities is a contentious one in Pakistan, for, the minorities are not recognised by the constitution. The Pakistani constitution speaks only of religious identity. The use of concepts like "minority" is an aberration to any democratic processes.

The women's movement had to make certain choices and decisions. It was a turning point for the movement. It chose to organise collective struggle on the basis of politics of identity. It also engaged in cross-sectoral alliance building. Women's movement has consistently resisted polarisation of other movements, so it has

always asserted its stake in other movements.

The women's movement in Pakistan has come a long way since its struggle against so called "honour killings". Now, all political parties seek its help in drafting amendments to laws that otherwise protects killers. The women's movement is the only coherent movement in today's world. This by itself should not make the movement complacent. The movement had seen an erosion of its internal solidarity and it needs to reassert itself.

From the Floor:

* Although assertion by Muslim women in India has a long way to go, yet there are pockets of affirmation.

* In Pudukkottai, the ulema elements exhorted pressure to stop construction of a mosque that the Muslim women beedi workers had decided to build for themselves. Although the construction has stopped but the women have not given up their struggle.

* Rise of Hindu fundamentalism as seen in the Gujarat genocide is a serious concern for the women's movement. Saving "Muslim women" is used as part of legitimising the discourse. Democratic spaces are being lost and fights against injustice construed as anti-state. There is need to unveil the smokescreen of "economic terrorism" of the VHP and also their nexus with USA and Israel. Women's movements have to take these issues on their agenda.

* There is need to negotiate through women's multiple identity. For example, it could be more strategic to fall back on beedi workers identity as points for mobilisation rather than supporting Muslim women's rights (to build the mosque) as it could be interpreted as "outside influence".

* The situation in Indonesia is quite similar where Muslim women are caught between fragmentation and regionalisation. Growing fundamentalism has led to increasing practice of "female circumcision".

* The women's movement could be the "alarm raiser" as women are the first to feel the impact in any conflict situation. For example, caste panchayat actions on intercaste marriages as precursors of caste violence on a larger scale. Likewise, women from North African migrant groups are supporting French secularism as

opposed to oppression by fundamental forces in their communities.

* What are the legal instruments that are built around the notion of collective rights as it has been resisted at the global level? Right to “self determination” has to be located within the framework of collective right.

* “Masculinisation of mind” – hegemonic masculinity has to be countered by women’s groups.

* Women’s groups in Bangladesh need to re-strategise since the political parties who come to power use women’s issues blatantly.

* The need to discuss other forms of fundamentalism and not talk only of “Islamic fundamentalism” – all Muslims are not fundamentalists. Muslim women are fighting for their own rights.

* As feminists, we have to be very cautious in our use of words like “fundamentalism”, “secularism”. We need to see the present in the historical context of imperialist self-construction as liberators from traditions. We are not confusing Islamic religion with systemic oppression of women.

* There is a need to trace roots of women’s oppression before Taliban came into power in

Afghanistan.

* Alarm bells rising for increased militarisation – door to door political dialogue is closing down. Movement for self-determination is becoming statement on terrorism.

From the Chair:

Women’s movements need to understand the new configuration and redefinition of the state with global and local confluence. There are links between systemic, cultural and public violence and convergence of domains.

Strategies: women’s movements have to reflect on the “right” discourse as “rights” advocated by the neo-liberals is individualistic. Also “freedom of choice” is part of neo-liberal economic policy. The World Bank has positioned violence as a public health issue as it impacts women’s productivity. So, there is a subtle shift from “rights” to “development”, but the positive aspect is that it makes the state accountable.

The women’s movement should reassess its relationship with the state as earlier it was relatively benign but now the state has withdrawn from its responsibilities and is strengthening its policing role. Thus, the debate about “in or against” is no longer relevant.



Session IV

YET ANOTHER WAR: IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEO-LIBERAL ECONOMIC PARADIGM

Chair: Kamla Bhasin, India
Speakers: Khushi Kabeer, Bangladesh
Eva Warburg, Sweden
Gabriele Dietrich, India
Meera, Nepal

Bangladesh: Put Economic Issues Upfront on the Agenda

Khushi Kabeer

Wars are all about economics and profits – part of imperialistic ideology.

Despite violence and patriarchal oppression, women were earlier the economic agents in the family/ community. Production in subsistence economy was localised and community based, where women had the repository of knowledge and skills.

Industrialisation of agriculture had shifted women out of their familiar domain of “local” and put them in a space where they have no control, where commodity prices are determined by multinationals, where new technologies are being promoted to create more disparity.

The response of the NGOs was limited to placing women into the market through microfinance initiatives, which typically do not question structures of patriarchy or class. No questions are asked to answer whose interests are being served at the end. Poverty is exacerbated and most acutely felt by women. Land reform is no longer discussed and the focus is on off farm employment for women.

Livelihood displacement is critical in Bangladesh. Profit oriented aquaculture has not only marginalised agriculture but also eroded the base of traditional livelihood for local fisher communities, including women.

Religion is used by the state to impose such imperialist ideology. Bangladesh is witnessing an increasing global and corporate control over its economic system. So, women’s movements have to reclaim their space to engage in public debate about these critical issues.

Sweden: Women’s Movement Should Take Up Immigration Issues

Eva Warburg

In Sweden, stricter laws on immigration are in the offing. This enjoins upon the women’s movement to look at Swedish racism and its practice of culturalisation of minority.

Sexualisation of children is rampant through pornography.

The country has a thriving arms and weapons market. Although 50% women are represented in the parliament, no questions are even asked about the sale of arms.

Women’s movement has to pay adequate attention to the socio-economic issues of migrants.

Livelihood, Food Security and Globalisation

Gabriele Dietrich

Class, caste and neo-liberal paradigm – all interconnected — go beyond issues concerning only women. Each of this is negotiating and impacting at the local level.

Food security is critical as it concerns both life and livelihoods. Globalisation has ushered in cycles of destruction. The impact of global forces, uneven as it is, has so very often impacted the people of developing countries, including women, in an uneven fashion. Destruction of natural resources, so integrally linked to the capital’s drive for profits and surpluses, in turn leaves a trail of destruction as far as livelihoods and local skills go.

This trend needs to be halted. Women’s movement, while taking up issues of women, can hardly afford to ignore the overall context in which we are living.



Challenges in Nepal

Meera

In Nepal, the Maoist movement has had severe implications for women's/children's safety and security. Even prior to Maoist movement, women have always had to struggle against sexual assault, '*kumari pratha*', prostitution, trafficking and so on.

Nepal's leaning since 1990 towards capitalism and liberalism has further exacerbated the problem. With the loss of traditional livelihood base, distress migration has increased manifold. Experience on the ground indicates that girls and women are worst affected as they either end up in the brothels or as dancing girls in bars.

Political parties have failed to protect the rights of minorities, children and women. Women's movement has to be strong and put up a collective struggle at the local level, particularly on issues related to the break down of the local economy.

From the Floor:

* Interdependence of pooling on resources is critical to avoid diktat of the World Bank or USAID.

* WSF had demonstrated a wide range of

alternatives available. The women's movements have to ask themselves as to why those alternatives have not been used and promoted? The need is to have conviction in these alternatives (as demonstrated by tribals or dalits at a micro level) and proliferate them.

* Feminist agenda needs to be re-examined as the NGO driven micro-finance programmes have placed women in the market in the guise of empowerment. Patriarchy remains unchallenged thereby maintaining the status quo.

* Feminist movement needs to sharpen the analysis of violence. The focus has to shift from overt forms of violence to structural violence to be able to address issues related to food security/food sovereignty.

From the Chair:

Why should we be discussing 'neo-liberalism'? Instead, it should be called "neo-imperialism". Violence has its roots in, among others, economic factors. Wars of identity are fought for economic reasons. Behind every war, there are issues of control over resources – be it petroleum or forests or jobs. Capitalism with patriarchy is fighting to gain control over women's labour. So, women's movements have to strategise and provide alternatives – the TIA (There Is Alternative) factor and not TINA (There is No Alternative).



Evening Programme

Time to get energised...

The Vagina Monologues

US activist-writer Eve Ensler started a cultural phenomenon in the West with her play, "The Vagina Monologues". This Obie Award-winning play is based on interviews conducted by Ensler with women across the globe about their experiences of sexuality, symbolised by their relationships with their vaginas. Ensler has captured both the associated pain and excitement, discussing various issues considered taboo such as menstruation, rape, sexual encounters and childbirth.

The Vagina Monologues scripted and performed by Eve Ensler was brought to Delhi by V-Day, founded by Eve and a group of women in New York in 1998. V-Day is a global movement and a catalyst to end violence against women.



A Q&A after the play

Session V

CONTEMPORARY THEMES AND FUTURE STRATEGIES

Chair: Nandita Shah, India
Speakers: Fahima Hashim, Sudan
Palwasha Hasan, Afghanistan
Salima Hashmi, Pakistan
Kavita Srivastav, India
Sumika Pareira, Sri Lanka
Alia Razvi, Afghanistan

Sudan: Female Circumcision, Patriarchy's Control over Female Body

Fahima Hashim

The civil war in Sudan has witnessed women being raped, people being displaced and leaving their villages. There is the great myth surrounding the notion of virginity and shame - who ultimately controls it? Is it a family property?

Female genital mutilation is very common in Sudan where 90% of women are circumcised. This is yet another instrument of patriarchy to control women's sexuality.

(Fahima has documented stories of women who want a new future and look forward to new a Sudan. Her stories are woven around the processes of socialisation and the way sexuality is constructed by patriarchy. One of her stories poignantly depicts the identity of a displaced woman – how lack of space, feelings of deprivation and exclusion construct identity.)

Afghan Women's Contribution to Peace and Civil Society Building

Palwasha Hassan

In Afghanistan, the devastation, brought about by two decades of and escalation of fundamentalism, has pushed women further into oblivion.

However, the representation by the international community (oversimplification) of Afghan women is a matter of concern. It must be remembered that the women's movement in Afghanistan had been struggling and fighting for women's rights long before the international community came into the picture. In any case, the international communities readily forgot about human devastation and left the country and its people to deal with the super power and vagaries of regional politics soon after it had its share of success in the cold

war in Afghanistan.

During the long years of conflict, women had lost their already limited status of social and political participation, were subjected to backlash of patriarchal values and growing religious fundamentalist politics. However, the point to be emphasised is that women not only managed to survive but their resilience found new ways and strategies to emerge as the peace builders.

One of the greatest achievements for women in Afghanistan during this phase of nation building was the positioning of women in the Bonn peace agreement. The establishment of the Ministry for women's affairs and nomination of the State Minister on women were the positive institutional mechanisms for the delivery of a gender framework in nation building.

However, all this would not have been possible without the struggle of women over the years whether as teachers in the underground during Taliban regime or their work on peace initiatives at various levels prior and parallel to the Bonn agreement.

In spite of all the political and institutional changes, their challenge still remains in terms of validating women's engagement in the reconstruction process and the need for long-term struggle for bringing meaningful positive changes in their lives. A few pointers for the women's movement to move ahead:

- * Women in Afghanistan need to learn and build on the experiences from women in South Asia to consolidate their role in building democracy and vibrant civil society

- * Effective advocacy towards positive and constructive engagement of women's groups with the elected government

- * Training in law reforms and effective advocacy skills for women

*Wider education for girls, particularly in the age group of 15-25

Portrayal of Female Body

Salima Hashmi

Through pictures and paintings, Salima talked of representations of the female body in Pakistan. Paintings of male painters depict idealisation and romanticisation of the female body that indicates male ownership. Female body is portrayed as separate from the “woman”, thereby containing her sexuality. However, the representations of the female body is changing because of the women’s movements...

Reclaiming Public Spaces through Electoral Processes

Kavita Srivastav

The women’s movement, so very often, finding itself on the margin of margins, needs to reflect on how to break through the constraints and create spaces in political and social life.

The decade of 80s and 90s marked the feminising and sexualising of public spaces. Also feminists in the 80s tried not only to break the silence related to domestic violence but also build institutional accountability while dealing with violence against women. To provide a holistic redressal against violence, the movement intervened at multiple levels – police, shelter, counseling and so on.

This has been an ongoing process and the 90s witnessed women’s centred issues being represented in the public discourse – right to information, right to work, right to food security, etc. Problems that were specific to dalit or tribal women were placed and debated on public fora.

However, presently, women’s movements are facing huge challenges in terms of fighting against the war against Iraq, inequality and intolerance. What has the movement done to counter the growing legitimacy and ideology of right wing fascism that has been promoting politics of violence for the last 50 years?

One of the ways to combat the growing fascist politics was to enter into the electoral process. It should have the twin strategy of not only fighting the elections but also engaging and campaigning against the politics of

violence and hatred. It is a wake up call for the movement to re-define, reclaim spaces to create new type of politics before it gets too late.

Sri Lanka: Women - Victims of Violence and Low Political Participation

Sumika Pareira

The intensive ethnic struggle of over two decades in Sri Lanka has left its scars on women. The situation is volatile even though weapons are relatively silent today. The peace talks have stopped and the general election has been called for.

Women have been subjected to extreme forms of violence in the war-ravaged areas. It is estimated that about 83% of women have been killed by their own husbands. Besides violence, women continue to face wage discrimination especially in the informal sector.

Forces of globalisation have hit the rural economy. Rural communities have lost their livelihoods and women have lost their home industries, leading to large-scale migration. Migrant women are the worst affected as they come back traumatised having suffered physical and mental bruises.

Political participation of women (only 4.6%) continues to be extremely low in the backdrop of a violent political culture. Health and literacy indicators are abysmally poor.

For the last 20 years, women’s movement has been in the forefront fighting for economic, social and political rights and decision making for women. The movement has joined hands with other civil society groups to fight against injustice and exploitation.

The women’s movement in Sri Lanka has to continue its advocacy on gender sensitive education, sensitising mass media. The movement should also play an active role with South Asian women’s groups to work towards peace and harmony in the region.

Warlordism and Terrorism in Afghanistan

Alia Razvi

What is the situation of women after the collapse of the Taliban? Has anything changed for the women? What is the reason for all the oppression?

The bombing (by USA), purportedly, was to liberate women from the Taliban. In reality there has been no visible change in the lives and situation of Afghan women, with the exception of a few in Kabul who were going to schools/colleges and working.

Women in other provinces are fighting against the warlords. The governor of Herat province had posed the same set of restrictions as the Taliban – lack of mobility, sexual torture and lack of education, to name a few. Consequently, self-immolation, suicides (due to “shame”) have increased significantly as reported by the Amnesty International.

So, why had there been no real change?

It is because the Taliban had been replaced by another religious fundamentalist group – jihadis – the northern alliance backed by USA. Key positions were given to fundamentalists who raped and pilfered. The northern alliance was a symbol of massacre.

Opium cultivation, warlordism, terrorism, sexual violence were all the issues and challenges confronting the women in Afghanistan. The election results were fairly predictable and there is no real democracy, freedom and women’s rights in Afghanistan.

Revolutionary Afghan Women’s Association (RAWA) is committed to raise its voice against fundamentalism. “Telling the truth is revolutionary and we (RAWA) always want to remain revolutionary”.

From the Floor:

* What is the perspective/direction of the women’s movement? There has not been enough critique on the technology that is undermining life, livelihood and diversity. The movement has to reflect more deeply and understand the ways in which war technology has been socialised. It is atomising everyone and breaking the interconnectedness.

* The movement had created space, which it is losing on the ground. While it wants politics of wide reciprocity, it cannot be done only virtually/e-mail! The movement needs to make collective effort to make diversity alive and bring back “subsistence” into the agenda in order to find new ways of understanding food, life and livelihood.

* The women’s movement is missing the bus! The

question is not only of linking with other movements but the ways in which these are being gendered. The movement has to have a long term and holistic perspective.

* Technology is a critical issue in bio-diversity as food security is getting gradually eroded impacting on the lives of millions of people. Therefore, the question is how to gain control over resources? How to protect the communities engaged in subsistence, nurturing life and producing social goods over capitalism that is destroying the social produce? So, it is time to bring the experiences on the ground back to the agenda.

* Social unrest in China – widening gulf between rich and poor, rising violence against women, etc due to privatisation. China needs to learn from experiences of other countries.

* On whose bodies are wars being fought? Gender audit of defence budget is urgently needed. Perhaps have an e-group to keep the process of dialogue moving. Also see the linkage between sale of arms with increase in domestic violence.

* Disability was not on the agenda of this conference. Silence on disability is distressing, as they are more likely to be vulnerable to violence. There are so many women and children being disabled and maimed in many different countries. Human rights of the disabled are critical to feminist and peace activism.

* Make a subversive entry and reclaim the feminist space and turn it into a feminist terrain while the entire developed world is busy discussing the “millennium development goals”. The women’s movement needs to conceptually move from modernity to post modernity and overcome the division (e.g., masculine/feminine, male bodies/female bodies, etc). need to learn fluidity and fusion to fight for our rights.

* Need to strengthen alternative voices of the women’s movement and reclaim spaces in the “activist assembly”.

* Reclaim our creativity without clinging to our ideological baggage. Should be able to take risks and not worry about the “political correctness”.

* Integration with other movements like lesbians and sex workers.

From the Chair:

The strategies of the women's movements need to be re-examined. There is a need to reflect on various struggles and see what difference we have made. This is an opportunity to rethink modes of resistance in the light of the changing global and regional context.

The aggressive wars are linked to many invisible wars at home. In these diverse wars – on the battlefields and at homes – there's a need to understand the multiplicity of players involved. All the players, in the guise of mainstreaming gender issues, were co-opting ideologies and concepts of the women's movement.

The strategies of women's movements have to integrate the inter-sectionality.



SUMMING UP: REVIEW, REFRESH AND RE-VISION

The conference started with a conceptual framework of violence and locating it in different arenas where boundaries of structural issues, globalisation and fundamentalism are overlapping. Resistance can be found at these intersections, where identity and new relationships are being constructed. We need to look at the material basis of violence.

The challenge is to re-examine our relationship with the state. Which state – right wing? Market, duty bearer? Also we have to look at various forms of mobilisation to be able to influence wider political process that constructs bodies and politics. We should be able to counter state supported violence.

We need to apply a feminist lens to issues that seem overtly “benign” and general. For example, the linkage between IT industry and fundamentalist organisations.

It is imperative that we as feminists provide new models for the youth, cultural icons (forms of expression, re-look at ourselves and relocate strategies.



Evening Programme

Time to celebrate...

Women Artistes for Justice, Harmony and Peace Music Concert

Poetry, music, dance – all in the open air theatre. It was an evening of celebration among feminists and friends to renew the joys of friendship and harmony. It was also the time to greet and celebrate the passion and creativity of women artistes who had come from different parts of the world.

The women who were present that evening to join other global voices against violence and war were- Zehra Nigah, Salima Hashmi, Samina Ahmad and Samina Hussain from Pakistan; Anushe from Bangladesh; Eve Ensler from USA; Eva Warberg from Sweden; Ananya Chatterjea from India/USA and Shubha Mudgal, Manu Kohli, Artistes Unlimited and Jagori Group from India.

Some glimpses of the protest against war in Iraq and the Music Concert



